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ELFRIDA,

A

Dramatic Poem.

Written on the Model of

The Antient GREEK TRAGEDY.

By Mr. MASON.

LONDON,
Printed for J. and P. KNAPTON, in *Ludgate-street*.
MDCCLII.

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LETTERS

CONCERNING

The following Drama.

LETTER I.

I Was aware, when I ſent you my Poem, that it would be liable to the very objections you make to it. Yet perhaps, they will be obviated to your ſatisfaction, when I have laid before you (as indeed I ought to have done at firſt) the original idea which led me to the choice of ſuch a ſubject, and to execute it in ſo peculiar a manner.

Had I intended to give an exact copy of the ancient Drama, your objections to the preſent Poem would be unanſwerable. But my deſign was much leſs confin'd. I meant only to purſue the ancient method ſo far as it is probable a Greek Poet, were he alive, would now do, in order to adapt himſelf to the genius of our times, and the character of our Tragedy. According to this

notion, every thing was to be allowed to the preſent taſte, which nature and Ariſtotle could poſſibly diſpenſe with; and nothing of intrigue or refinement was to be admitted, at which antient judgment could reaſonably take offence. Good ſenſe, as well as antiquity, preſcribed an adherence to the three great Unities; theſe therefore were ſtrictly obſerved. But on the other hand, to follow the modern maſters in thoſe reſpects wherein they had not ſo faultily deviated from their predeceſſors, a ſtory was choſen, in which the tender, rather than the noble paſſions were predominant, and in which even love had the principal ſhare. Characters too were drawn as nearly approaching to private ones, as Tragic dignity would permit; and affections rais'd rather from the impulſe of common humanity, than the diſtreſſes of royalty and the fate of kingdoms. Beſide this, for the ſake of natural embelliſhment, and to reconcile mere modern readers to that ſimplicity of fable, in which I thought it neceſſary to copy the antients, I contriv'd to lay the ſcene in an old romantic foreſt. For, by this means, I was enabled to enliven the poem by various touches of paſtoral deſcription; not affectedly brought in from the ſtore-houſe of a pictureſque imagination, but neceſſarily reſulting from the ſcenery of the place itſelf: A beauty, ſo extremely ſtriking in the COMUS of Milton, and the AS YOU LIKE IT of Shakeſpeare; and of which the Greek Muſe (tho' fond of rural imagery) has afforded few examples, beſides that admirable one in the PHILOCTETES of Sophocles.

By this idea I could wiſh you to regulate your criticiſm. I need not, I think, obſerve to you that theſe

deviations

deviations from the practice of the antients may be reasonably defended. For we were long since agreed, that, where Love does not degenerate into episodical gallantry, but makes the foundation of the distress, it is, from the universality of its influence, a passion very proper for Tragedy. And I have seen you too much mov'd at the representation of some of our best Tragedies of private story, to believe you will condemn me for making the other deviation.

LETTER II.

I Am glad, you approve the method, I have taken, of softening the rigor of the old Drama. If I have, indeed, softened it sufficiently for the modern taste, without parting with any of the essentials of the Greek method, I have obtain'd my purpose: which was to obviate some of the popular objections made to the antient form of Tragedy. For the current opinion, you know, is, that by the strict adherence to the Unities, it restrains the genius of the poet; by the simplicity of its conduct, it diminishes the pathos of the fable; and, by the admission of a continued chorus, prevents that agreeable embarras, which awakens our attention, and interests our passions.

The universal veneration, which we pay to the name of Shakespear, at the same time that it has improv'd our relish for the higher beauties of Poetry, has undoubtedly been the ground-work of all this false criticism. That disregard, which, in compliance merely with the taste of the times, he shew'd of all the neces-

ſary rules of the Drama, hath ſince been conſider'd as a characteriſtic of his vaſt and original genius; and conſequently ſet up as a model for ſucceeding writers. Hence M. Voltaire remarks very juſtly, "que le me-"rite de cet auteur a perdu le Theatre Anglois. Le "tems, que ſeul fait la reputation des hommes, rend "à la fin leurs defauts reſpectables."

Yet, notwithſtanding the abſurdity of this low ſuperſtition, the notion is ſo popular amongſt Engliſhmen, that I fear it will never be entirely diſcredited, till a Poet riſes up amongſt us with a genius as elevated and daring as Shakeſpeare's, and a judgment as ſober and chaſtis'd as Racine's. But as it ſeems too long to wait for this prodigy, it will not ſurely be improper for any one of common talents, who would entertain the public without indulging its caprice, to take the beſt models of antiquity for his guides; and to adapt thoſe models, as near as may be, to the manners and taſte of his own times. Unleſs he do both, he will, in effect, do nothing. For it cannot be doubted, that the many groſs faults of our ſtage, are owing to the complaiſance and ſervility, with which the ordinary run of writers have ever humour'd that illiterate, whimſical, or corrupted age, in which it was their misfortune to be born.

Milton, you will tell me, is a noble exception to this obſervation. He is ſo, and would have been a nobler, had he not run into the contrary extreme. The contempt, in which, perhaps with juſtice, he held the age he liv'd in, prevented him from condeſcending either to amuſe or to inſtruct it. He had, before, given to his unworthy Countrymen the nobleſt Poem,

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that genius, conducted by ancient art, could produce; and he had ſeen them receive it with diſregard, if not with diſlike. Conſcious therefore of his own dignity, and of their demerit, he look'd to poſterity only for his reward, and to poſterity only directed his future labours. Hence it was perhaps, that he form'd his SAMPSON AGONISTES on a model more ſimple and ſevere than Athens herſelf would have demanded; and took Æſchylus for his maſter, rather than Sophocles or Euripides; intending by this conduct to put as great a diſtance as poſſible between himſelf and his contemporary writers; and to make his work (as he himſelf ſaid) *much different from what amongſt them paſſed for the beſt.*

The ſucceſs of the Poem was, accordingly, what one would have expected. The age, it appeared in, treated it with total neglect; neither hath that poſterity, to which he appealed, and which has done juſtice to moſt of his other writings, as yet given to this excellent piece its full meaſure of popular and univerſal fame. Perhaps in your cloſet, and that of a few more, who unaffectedly admire genuine nature and antient ſimplicity, the Agoniſtes may hold a diſtinguiſhed rank. Yet, I think, we cannot ſay (in Hamlet's phraſe) "*that it pleaſes the Million; it is ſtill Caviar to the ge-*"*neral.*"

Hence, I think, I may conclude, that unleſs one would be content with a very late and very learned poſterity, Milton's conduct in this point ſhould not be followed. A Writer of Tragedy muſt certainly adapt himſelf more to the general taſte; becauſe the Dramatic, of all kinds of Poetry, ought to

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be moſt univerſally reliſh'd and underſtood. The Lyric Muſe addreſſes herſelf to the imagination of a reader; the Didactic to his judgment; but the Tragic ſtrikes directly on his paſſions. Few men have a ſtrength of imagination capable of purſuing the flights of Pindar: Many have not a clearneſs of apprehenſion ſuited to the reaſonings of Lucretius and Pope: But ev'ry man has paſſions to be excited; and ev'ry man feels them excited by Shakeſpear.

But, tho' Tragedy be thus chiefly directed to the heart, it muſt be obſerved, that it will ſeldom attain its end without the concurrent approbation of the judgment. And to procure this, the artificial conſtruction of the fable goes a great way. In France, the excellence of their ſeveral poets is chiefly meaſur'd by this ſtandard. And amongſt our own writers, if you except Shakeſpeare (who indeed ought, for his other virtues, to be exempt from common rules) you will find, that the moſt regular of their compoſitions is generally reckon'd their *Chef d'œuvre*, witneſs the *All for Love* of Dryden, the *Venice preſerv'd* of Otway, and the *Jane Shore* of Rowe.

LETTER III.

THE ſcheme, you propos'd in your laſt, is I own practicable enough. Undoubtedly, moſt part of the Dialogue of the Chorus might be put into the mouth of an Emma or Matilda, who, with ſome little ſhew of ſiſterly concernment, might

be eaſily made to claim kindred with Earl Athelwold. Nay, by the addition of an unneceſſary incident or two, which would coſt me no more than they are worth in contriving, and an unmeaning perſonage or two, who would be as little expence in creating, I believe I could quickly make the whole tolerably fit for an Engliſh Audience.

But for all this I cannot perſuade myſelf to enter upon the taſk. I have, I know not how (like many of my betters,) contracted a kind of veneration for the old Chorus; and am willing to think it eſſential to the Tragic Drama. You ſhall hear the reaſons that incline me to this judgment. They reſpect the *Poet* and the *Audience*.

It is agreed, I think, on all hands, that, in the conduct of a fable, the admiſſion of a Chorus lays a neceſſary reſtraint on the *Poet*. The two unities of Time and Place, are eſteem'd by ſome of leſs conſequence in our modern Tragedy, than the third Unity of Action; but admit a Chorus, and you muſt, of neceſſity, reſtore them to thoſe equal rights, which they anciently, enjoyed, and yet claim, by the *Magna Charta* of Ariſtotle. For the difference, which the uſe of the Chorus makes, is this. The modern Drama contents itſelf with a fact *repreſented*; the antient requires it to be *repreſented before Spectators*. Now as it cannot be ſuppos'd, that theſe Spectators ſhould accompany the chief Perſonages into private apartments, one ſingle Scene or *unity of Place* becomes ſtrictly neceſſary. And as theſe Spectators are aſſembled on purpoſe to obſerve and bear a part in the action, the *time* of that action becomes, of courſe, that of the ſpectacle or repreſentation itſelf;

itſelf; it being unreaſonable to make the Spectators attend as long, as the Poet, in bringing about his Cataſtrophe, may require. And this is uſually the practice of the ancient Stage. The modern, on the contrary, regards very little theſe two capital reſtraints; and its diſuſe of the Chorus helps greatly to conceal the abſurdity. For the Poet, without offending ſo much againſt the laws of probability, may lead his perſonages from one part to another of the ſame palace or city, when they have only a paltry Servant or inſignificant Confidant to attend them. He may think himſelf at liberty to ſpend two or three days, months or even years in compleating his ſtory; to clear the Stage at the end or, if he pleaſes, in the middle of every act: and, being under no controul of the Chorus, he can break the continuity of the Drama, juſt where he thinks it convenient; and, by the aſſiſtance of a briſk fugue and a good violin, can perſuade his audience, that as much time has elaps'd as his Hero's, or rather his own diſtreſs may demand.

Hence it is, that ſecret intrigues become (as Mr. Dryden gravely calls them) the *beauties of our modern Stage*. Hence it is, that Incidents, and Buſtle, and *Buſineſs*, ſupply the place of Simplicity, Nature, and Pathos: A happy change, perhaps, for the generality of writers, who might otherwiſe find it impoſſible to fill *cette longue carriere de cinq actes*, which a Writer, ſufficiently experienced in theſe matters, ſays, *eſt ſi prodigieuſement difficile à remplir ſans Epiſodes*.

But, whatever theſe Play-makers may have gain'd by rejecting the Chorus, the true Poet has loſt conſiderably by it. For he has loſt a graceful and natu-

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ral reſource to the embellishments of Picturesque Deſcription, ſublime allegory, and whatever elſe comes under the denomination of *pure Poetry*. Shakeſpear, indeed, had the power of introducing this naturally, and, what is moſt ſtrange, of joining it with *pure Paſſion*. But I make no doubt, if we had a Tragedy of his form'd on the Greek model, we ſhould find in it more frequent, if not nobler, inſtances of the high Poetical capacity, than in any ſingle compoſition he has left us. I think you have a proof of this in thoſe parts of his hiſtorical plays, which are call'd Chorus's, and written in the common Dialogue metre. And your imagination will eaſily conceive, how fine an ode the deſcription of the night, preceding the battle of Agincourt, would have made in his hands, and what additional grace it would receive from that form of compoſition.

With the means of introducing Poetry naturally is loſt, alſo, the opportunity of conveying moral reflections with grace and propriety. But this comes more properly under conſideration, when I give you my thoughts on the advantage the Audience receiv'd from a well-conducted Chorus.

LETTER IV.

IN my laſt I took no notice of that ſuperior pomp and majeſty, which the Chorus neceſſarily added to the ſcene of the Drama. I made no remarks on the agreable variety it introduc'd into the verſification and metre; nor ſhew'd how, by uniting the harmony of the Lyre to the pomp of the Buſkin, muſick became

intimately connected with it, and furniſhed it with all it's additional graces. Theſe and many other advantages I might have inſiſted upon, had I thought them ſo material as the two I mentioned; the latter of which, namely its being a proper vehicle for moral and ſentiment, is ſo material, that I think nothing can poſſibly atone for the loſs of it.

In thoſe parts of the Drama, where the judgment of a mixt audience is moſt liable to be miſled by what paſſes before it's view, the chief actors are generally too much agitated by the furious paſſions, or too much attach'd by the tender ones, to think cooly, and impreſs on the ſpectators a moral ſentiment properly. A Confidant or Servant has ſeldom ſenſe enough to do it, never dignity enough to make it regarded. Inſtead therefore of theſe, the antients were provided with a band of diſtinguiſh'd perſons, not merely capable of ſeeing and hearing, but of arguing, adviſing, and reflecting; from the leader of which a moral ſentiment never came unnaturally, but ſuitably and gracefully; and from the troop itſelf, a poetical flow of tender commiſeration, of religious ſupplication, or of virtuous triumph, was ever ready to heighten the pathos, to inſpire a reverential awe of the Deity, and to advance the cauſe of *honeſty* and of truth.

If you aſk me, how it augmented the pathetic, I cannot give you a better anſwer than the *Abbè Vatry* has done in his diſſertation on the ſubject publiſhed in the *memoirs de l'Acad. des Inſcr. &c.* "It affected this (ſays he) both in its *odes*, "and *dialogue*. The wonderful power of Muſic and "the Dance is univerſally allowed. And, as theſe were

"always

" always *accompaniments* to the Odes, there is no doubt
" but they contributed greatly to move the paſſions. It
" was neceſſary that there ſhould be odes or interludes,
" but it was alſo neceſſary, that theſe interludes ſhould
" not ſuffer the minds of the Audience to cool, but,
" on the contrary, ſhould ſupport and fortify thoſe paſ-
" ſions, which the previous ſcenes had already excited.
" Nothing imaginable could produce this effect better,
" than the choral ſongs and dances, which fill'd the
" mind with ideas correſponding to the ſubject, and
" never fail'd to add new force to the ſentiments of the
" principal perſonages. In the Dialogue alſo, the
" Chorus ſerv'd to move the paſſions by ſhewing to
" the ſpectators other ſpectators ſtrongly affected by the
" action. A ſpectacle of ſuch a kind as is fitted to ex-
" cite in us the paſſions of *Terror*, and *Pity*, will
" not of itſelf ſo ſtrongly affect us, as when we ſee
" others, alſo, affected by it. The Painters have ge-
" nerally underſtood this ſecret, and have had recourſe
" to an expedient, ſimilar to that of the Chorus of the
" Poets. Not content with the ſimple repreſentation of
" an hiſtorical event, they have alſo added groups of
" aſſiſtant figures, and expreſt in their faces the diffe-
" rent paſſions, they would have their picture excite.
" Nay they ſometimes inliſt into their ſervice even irra-
" tional animals. In the *ſlaughter of the Innocents*, Le
" Brun was not ſatified with expreſſing all the horror,
" of which the ſubject is naturally capable, he has
" alſo painted two Horſes with their hair ſtanding on
" end, and ſtarting back, as afraid to trample upon the
" bleeding infants. This is an artifice which has often
" been employ'd, and which has always, ſucceeded. A
" good poet ſhould do the ſame; and Iphigenia ſhould

" not be ſuffer'd to appear on the Theatre, without " being accompanied with perſons capable of feeling " her misfortunes."

Had this ingenious Abbè ſeen the famous Belliſarius of Vandyke, I am apt to believe he would have thought it a much more noble illuſtration of the matter. The Soldier in that piece, tho' ſo much condemn'd by our modern Profeſſors of *Vertù* for being, as they ſay, the principal Figure, is the very thing, which raiſes this picture from a ſimple Portrait (which it muſt otherwiſe have been) to the fineſt moral painting; and in Greece would have plac'd the Painter amongſt that claſs of Artiſts, which they eſteem'd the nobleſt, the ΗΘΟΓΡΑΦΟΙ. The greateſt Tragic Poet could not have rais'd a more exquiſite diſtreſs, than this judicious Painter has done by the attitude of that Soldier; as well as by the ſubordinate figures, which, with great propriety, are female ones: nothing being ſo likely to raiſe that pitiable diſdain in a military mind, which he wanted to expreſs, as to ſee ſuch a Hero reliev'd by charity, and that too the charity of girls and old women.

But, returning to my ſubject, I will juſt obſerve to you, that if it be proper to aſſiſt an audience in reliſhing the pathetic, by ſhewing an imitation of that pathos in the Chorus, it is much more ſo to inſtruct them how to be affected properly, with the characters and actions which are repreſented in the courſe of the Drama. The character of PIERRE in *Venice preſerv'd*, when left entirely to the judgment of the audience, is perhaps one of the moſt improper for public view, that ever was produced on any ſtage. It is almoſt impoſſible, but ſome part of the ſpectators ſhould go from the repreſentation with very

very falſe and immoral expreſſions. But had that Tragedy been written on the antient plan; had Pierre's character been drawn juſt as it is, and ſome few alterations made in Jaffeir's, I know no two Characters more capable of doing ſervice in a moral view, when juſtly animadverted upon by the Chorus. I don't ſay, I would have truſted Otway with the writing of it.

To have done and to releaſe you. Bad characters become on this plan as harmleſs in the hands of the Poet, as the Hiſtorian; and good ones become infinitely more uſeful, by how much the Poetic is more forcible, than the Hiſtorical mode of inſtruction.

LETTER V.

THE reaſon, why in a former Letter you adviſ'd me to alter the Chorus, is made very apparent in your laſt. For, by perſuading me to get the Odes ſet to muſic, and to riſk the play on the ſtage, I underſtand only that you are willing, any how, to make it a more profitable work for me, that it can poſſibly be by means of the preſs alone.

Yet certainly, Sir, one ſingle reflection on our Britiſh pit will make you change your ſentiments effectually. Think only on the trial made by M. Racine, in a nation much before our's, in a taſte for probability and decorum in Theatrical diverſions. In his two laſt Tragedies, you know, he has fully ſucceeded in the very thing I aim'd at, and has adapted a noble imitation of ancient ſimplicity to the taſte of his own times: particularly in his Athaliah, a poem in which the moſt ſuperb

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and auguſt ſpectacle, the moſt intereſting event, and the moſt ſublime flow of inſpir'd Poetry, are all nobly and naturally united. Yet I am told, that neither that, nor the *Eſther*, retains it Chorus, when repreſented on the French Theatre.

To what is this owing? To the refinement moſt certainly of our modern muſic. This art is now carried to a pitch of perfection, or, if you will, of corruption, which makes it utterly incapable of being an adjunct to Poetry. *Il y a grand apparence, que les progres que vous avez faits dans la muſique, ont nui enfin à ceux de la veritable Tragedie. C'eſt un talent, qui a fait tort à un autre*; ſays M. Voltaire with his uſual taſte and judgment. Our different cadences, our diviſions, variations, repetitions, without which modern muſic cannot ſubſiſt, are intirely improper for the expreſſion of poetry, and were ſcarce known to the ancients.

But could this be manag'd, the additional expence neceſſarily attendant on ſuch a performance, would make the matter impracticable. This Mr. Dryden foreſaw long ago. The paſſage is curious.

" A new Theatre, much more ample and much " deeper, muſt be made for that purpoſe; beſides the " coſt of ſometimes forty or fifty habits: which is an " expence too large to be ſupply'd by a company of " actors. 'Tis true I ſhould not be ſorry to ſee a *Cho-* " *rus* on a Theatre, more than as large and as deep " again as our's, built and adorn'd at a King's Charges; " and on that condition, and another, which is, that " my hands were not bound behind me, as now they " are, I ſhould not deſpair of making ſuch *a Tragedy*, " as might be both *inſtructive* and *delightful* according

" to

" to the *manner* of the Grecians." What he means by having *his hands bound*, I imagine, is, that he was either engag'd to his ſubſcribers for a Tranſlation of Virgil, or to the manager of the Theatre for ſo many plays a ſeaſon. This ſuffrage of Mr. Dryden is, however, very appoſite to the preſent point. But it ſerves, alſo, to vindicate my deſign of imitating the Greek Drama. For if he, who was ſo prejudiced to the modern ſtage, as to think intrigue a capital beauty in it; if he, I ſay, owns that the grand ſecret *prodeſſe et delectare* was the characteriſtic of the Greek Drama only, nothing I think can better juſtify my preſent attempt than the approbation he gives to it in this paſſage.

Having now, I think, ſettled with you all matters of general criticiſm, I hope in your next you will give me your objections to *ſcenes*, *ſpeeches*, *images*, &c. And be aſſur'd I ſhall treat your judgment in theſe matters with greater deference, than I have done in what related to the Stage and the Chorus.

Pemb. Hall. 1751.

Perſons of the Drama.

ORGAR, Earl of Devonſhire.

CHORUS, of Britiſh Virgins.

ELFRIDA, Daughter to ORGAR.

ATHELWOLD, Huſband to ELFRIDA.

EDWIN, a Meſſenger.

EDGAR, King of England.

ORGAR diſguis'd in a Peaſant's Habit ſpeaks the Prologue.

SCENE, a Lawn before ATHELWOLD's Caſtle in *Harewood Foreſt*.

ELFRIDA,

A

Dramatic Poem.

ORGAR.

HOW nobly does this venerable wood,
Gilt with the glories of the orient ſun,
Emboſom yon fair manſion! The ſoft air
Salutes me with moſt cool and temp'rate breath;
And, as I tread, the flow'r-beſprinkled lawn
Sends up a gale of fragrance. I ſhould gueſs,
If e'er Content deign'd viſit mortal clime,
This was her place of deareſt reſidence.
Grant Heav'n! I find it ſuch. 'Tis now three months,
Since firſt Earl Athelwold eſpous'd my daughter.
He then beſought me, for ſome little ſpace
The nuptials might be ſecret; many reaſons,
He ſaid, induc'd to this: I made no pauſe,
But, reſting on his prudence, to his will
Gave abſolute concurrence. Soon as married,

He to this ſecret ſeat convey'd Elfrida;
Convey'd her as by ſtealth, enjoy'd, and left her:
Yet not without I know not what excuſe
Of call to court, of Edgar's royal friendſhip,
And England's welfare. To his prince he went:
And ſince, as by intelligence I gather,
He oft reviſits this his cloyſter'd wife;
But ever with a privacy moſt ſtudied,
Borrowing diſguiſes, till inventive art
Can ſcarce ſupply him with variety.
His viſits, as they're ſtol'n, are alſo ſhort;
Seldom above the circuit of one ſun:
Then back to court, while ſhe his abſence mourns
Full many a lonely hour. I brook not this.
Had Athelwold eſpous'd ſome baſe-born peaſant,
This uſage had been apt: but, when he took
My daughter to his arms, he took a virgin
Thro' whoſe rich veins the blood of ancient Kings
Ran in unſullied ſtream. Yes, her high lineage
Would give her place and notice with the nobleſt
That ſhines in Edgar's court. Why is not ſhe
In that reſplendent throng? Her beauty too
(I ſpeak not from a father's fooliſh fondneſs)
Would ſmile amid the loveliеſt, and reflect
No vulgar glory on that beauty's maſter.
This act beſpeaks the madman. Who, that own'd
An em'rald, jaſpar, or rich chryſolite,

Would hide its luſtre? he would bid it blaze
Conſpicuous, in the front of that fair wreath
Which binds his brow. Happly this Athelwold
May have eſpous'd ſome other. 'Sdeath he durſt not.
My former feats in arms muſt have inform'd him,
That Orgar, while he liv'd, would never prove
A traytor to his honor. If he has—
This aged arm is not ſo much unſtrung
By ſlack'ning years, but juſt revenge will brace it.
And, by yon awful heav'n—But hold, my rage,
I came to ſcrutinize this matter coolly,
Hence, to conceal the father and the earl,
This pilgrim's ſtaff, and ſcrip, and all theſe marks
Of vagrant poverty.

CHORUS (within.)

Hail to thy living light, ambroſial Morn!
All hail thy roſeat ray!

ORGAR.

But hark, the ſound of ſweeteſt minſtrelſy
Breaks on my ear. The females, I ſuppoſe,
Whom Athelwold has fixt my child's attendants;
That, when ſhe 'wails the abſence of her lord,
Their lenient airs, and ſprightly-fancied ſongs,
May ſteal away her woes. See, they approach:
I'll wait the cadence of their harmony,
And then addreſs them with ſome feigned tale. [*He retires.*

CHORUS.

ODE.

Hail to thy living light,
Ambroſial Morn! all hail thy roſeat ray:
That bids gay Nature all her charms diſplay
In varied beauty bright;
That bids each dewy-ſpangled flowret riſe,
And dart around its vermeil dyes;
Bids ſilver luſtre grace yon ſparkling tide,
That winding warbles down the mountain's ſide.

Away, ye Goblins all,
Wont the bewilder'd traveller to daunt;
Whoſe vagrant feet have trac'd your ſecret haunt
Beſide ſome lonely wall,
Or ſhatter'd ruin of a moſs-grown tow'r,
Where, at pale midnight's ſtilleſt hour,
Thro' each rough chink the ſolemn orb of night
Pours momentary gleams of trembling light.

Away, ye Elves, away:
Shrink at ambroſial Morning's living ray;
That living ray, whoſe pow'r benign
Unfolds the ſcene of glory to our eye,
Where, thron'd in artleſs majeſty,
The cherub Beauty ſits on Nature's ruſtic ſhrine.——

CHORUS, ORGAR.

CHORUS.

Silence, my ſiſters. Whence this rudeneſs, ſtranger,
That boldly prompted thine unbidden ear
To liſten theſe our ſtrains?

ORGAR.

Your pardon, Virgins:
I meant not rudeneſs, tho' I dar'd to liſten;
For ah! what ear ſo fortified and barr'd
Againſt the tuneful force of vocal charms,
But would with tranſport to ſuch ſweet aſſailants
Surrender its attention? Never yet
Have I paſt by the night-bird's 'cuſtom'd ſpray,
What time ſhe pours her wild, and artleſs ſong,
Without attentive pauſe, and ſilent rapture:
How could I then, with ſavage diſregard,
Hear voices tun'd by nature ſweet as hers,
Grac'd with all art's addition?

CHORUS.

Thy mean garb,
And this thy courtly phraſe but ill accord.
Whence, and what art thou, ſtranger?

ORGAR.

Virgins, know
Theſe limbs have oft been rob'd in fairer veſt:

But what avails it now? all have their fate;
And mine has been moſt wretched.

CHORUS.

May we aſk,
What cruel cauſe ---

ORGAR.

No! let this hapleſs breaſt
Still hide the melancholy tale.

CHORUS.

We know,
There oft is found an avarice in grief;
And the wan eye of Sorrow loves to gaze
Upon its ſecret hoard of treaſur'd woes
In pining ſolitude. Perhaps thy mind
Takes the ſame penſive caſt: if not, indulge
The tender temper of our virgin ſouls,
Which loves to melt in ſympathizing tears
And ſocial ſighs.

ORGAR.

Ah! ill would it become ye,
To let the woes of ſuch a wretch as I am,
E'er dim your bright eyes with a pitying tear.

CHORUS.

The eye, that will not weep another's ſorrow,
Should boaſt no gentler brightneſs than the glare,

That reddens in the eye-ball of the wolf.
Let us entreat ——

ORGAR.

Know, Virgins, I was born
To ample property of lands and flocks,
On this ſide Tweeda's ſtream. My youth and vigor
Atchiev'd full many a feat of martial proweſs:
Nor was my ſkill in chivalry unnoted
In the fair volume of my ſov'reign's love;
Who ever held me in his beſt eſteem,
And cloſeſt to his perſon. When he paid,
What all muſt pay, to fate; and ſhort-liv'd Edwy
Mounted the vacant throne, which now his brother
Fills (as loud Fame reports) right royally;
I then, unfit for pageantry and courts,
Retir'd me with a ſet of choſen vaſſals
To my paternal ſeat. But ah! not long
Had I enjoy'd the ſweets of that receſs,
Ere by the ſavage inroads of baſe hinds,
That ſallied frequent from the Scottiſh heights,
My lands were all laid waſte, my people murder'd;
And I, thro' impotence of age unfit
To quell their brutal rage, was forc'd to drag
My mis'ries thro' the land, a friendleſs wand'rer.

CHORUS.

We pity and condole thy wretched ſtate,
But we can do no more; which, on thy part,

Claims juſt returns of pity: for whoſe lot
Demands it more than theirs, whom fate forbids
To taſte the joys of courteous charity;
To wipe the trickling tears, which dew the cheek
Of palſied age; to ſmooth it's furrow'd brow,
And pay its grey hairs each due reverence?
Yet ſuch delight we are forbid to taſte;
For 'tis our lord's command, that not a ſtranger,
However high or lowly his degree,
Have entrance at theſe gates.

ORGAR.

Who may this tyrant be?

CHORUS.

Alas, no tyrant he; the more our wonder
At this harſh mandate: Tenderneſs and Pity
Have made his breaſt their home. He is a man
More apt thro' inborn gentleneſs to err,
In giving mercy's tide too free a courſe,
Than with a thrifty and illiberal hand
To circumſcribe its channel. This his praiſe
You'll hear the general theme in Edgar's court:
For Edgar ranks him firſt in his high favor;
Loads him with honors, which the Earl receives,
As does the golden cenſer frankincenſe,
Only to ſpread a ſacred gale of bleſſings
Thro' all the realm.

ORGAR.

Methinks, this pleaſing portrait
Bears ſtrong reſemblance of Lord Athelwold.

CHORUS.

Himſelf: no Briton but has heard his fame.

ORGAR.

'Tis wondrous ſtrange; can you conceive no cauſe
For this his conduct?

CHORUS.

None, that we may truſt.

ORGAR.

Your garbs beſpeak you for the fair attendants
Of ſome illuſtrious dame, the wife, or ſiſter
Of this dread earl.

CHORUS.

On this head too, old man,
We are commanded a religious ſilence:
Which ſtrictly we obey; for well we know
Fidelity's the beſt and faireſt wreath,
That can adorn a ſervant's brow. Farewell,
Depart with our beſt wiſhes; we do treſpaſs
To hold ſuch open converſe with a ſtranger.

ORGAR.

Stay, Virgins, ſtay; have ye no friendly ſhed,
But bord'ring on your caſtle, where theſe limbs

Might lay their load of misery for an hour?
Have ye no food, however mean and homely,
Wherewith I might recruit defective nature?
Ev'n while I speak, I feel my spirits fail;
And well, full well I know, their trembling feet,
Eer I can pace a hundred steps, will sink
Beneath their wretched burthen.

CHORUS.

Piteous sight!
What shall we do, my sisters? To admit
This man beneath the roof, would be to scorn
The Earl's fierce interdict; and yet my heart
Bleeds to behold that white, old, reverend head,
Bow'd with such misery.—Yes, we must admit him.
Hie thee, poor Pilgrim, to yon neighb'ring bow'r,
O'er which an old oak spreads his awful arm,
Mantled in brownest foliage, and beneath
The ivy, gadding from the untwisted stem,
Curtains each verdant side. There thou may'st rest,
There also find some dry'd, autumnal fruit,
Lodg'd in the hollow of its aged trunk.
Much do we wish 'twere better fare.

EDGAR.

Kind Heav'n!
Reward——

CHORUS.

Nay! ſtay not here to thank us,
But haſte to give your age this poor aſſiſtance.
That done, we do conjure you leave the place
With cautious ſecreſy; for was it known,
That thus we treſpaſs'd on our lord's command,
The conſequence were fatal.

ORGAR.

Faireſt Maid!
Think not I'll baſely draw down puniſhments
On my preſervers. I withdraw. May bleſſings
Show'r'd from yon fount of Bliſs repay your kindneſs.

[*Exit Orgar.*

SEMICHORUS.

Yes, ſiſters, yes; when pale diſtreſs
Implores your aiding hand,
Let not a partial faithfulneſs,
Let not a mortal's vain command
Urge you to break th' unalterable laws
Of heav'n-deſcended Charity.
Ah! follow ſtill the ſoft-ey'd Deity;
For know, each path ſhe draws,
Along the plain of life,
Meets at the central dome of ſocial Joy.
Follow the ſoft-ey'd Deity;
She bids ye, as ye hope for bleſſings, bleſs.
Aid then the gen'ral cauſe of gen'ral happineſs.

SEMICHORUS.

Humanity! thy awful ſtrain
Shall ever meet our ear
Sonorous, ſweet, and clear.
And as amid the ſprightly-ſwelling train
Of dulcet notes, that breath
From flute or lyre,
The deep baſe rolls its manly melody,
Guiding the tuneful choir;
So thou, Humanity, ſhalt lead along
Th' accordant paſſions in their moral ſong,
And give our mental concert trueſt harmony.

CHORUS.

But ſee, Elfrida comes.
Should we again reſume our former ſtrain,
And hail the Morn that paints her waking beauties;
Or wait her gentle bidding? Rather wait;
For, as I think, ſhe ſeems in muſing mood:
And there are times, when to the penſive ſoul
The warbling voice of ſofteſt melody
Seems but diſcordant harſhneſs.

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

O my Virgins,
With what a leaden and retarding weight,
Does Expectation load the wing of Time?
How have theſe three dull hours crept languid on,

Since firſt the crimſon mantle of the morn
Skirted yon gay horizon? Say, my Friends,
Have I miſcounted? Did not Athelwold
At parting fix this morn for his return,
This dear, long-wiſh'd for morn? He did, he did,
And ſeal'd it with a kiſs; I could not err,
And yet he comes not. He was wont outſtrip
The ſun's moſt early ſpeed, and make its riſing
To me unwiſh'd and needleſs. This delay
Creates ſtrange doubts and ſcruples in my breaſt.
Courts throng with beauties, and my Athelwold
Has a ſoft, ſuſceptible heart, as prone
To yield its love to ev'ry ſparkling eye,
As is the muſk-roſe to diſpenſe its fragrance
To ev'ry whiſp'ring breeze; perhaps he's falſe,
Perhaps Elfrida's wretched.

CHORUS.

See, Elfrida,
Ah ſee! how round yon branching elm the ivy
Twines its green chain, and poiſons what ſupports it.
Not leſs injurious to the blooming ſhoots
Of growing love is ſickly jealouſy.

ELFRIDA.

My mind nor pines with ſickly jealouſy,
Nor triumphs in ſecurity and peace.
Who loves, muſt fear; and ſure who loves like me,
Muſt greatly fear.

CHORUS.

Yet whence the cauſe? Your Earl
Has ever yet (this little breach excepted)
Been punctual to appointment. Did his eye
Glow with leſs ardent paſſion when he left you,
Than at the firſt bleſt meeting? No, I mark'd him,
His parting glance ſhot fervent, conſtant love,
And fealty unalter'd. Do not fear him.

ELFRIDA.

I ſhould not fear him, was his preſent ſtay
The only cauſe. Alas, it is not, Virgin!
Why comes my Earl ſo ſecret to theſe arms?
Why, but becauſe he fears ſome other fair
Should hear of his ſtol'n tranſports? Why am I
Here ſhrouded up, like the pale Votariſt,
Who knows no viſitant, ſave the lone owl,
That leaves his ivy-creſted battlement,
And ſails on ſlow wing thro' the cloyſter'd iſles,
Liſt'ning her ſaintly oriſons? Methinks,
She who can boaſt Earl Orgar for her ſire,
(Orgar, whom copious Deva hails her lord
Thro' each rich vale ſhe laves,) might well expect
To ſhare the ſports and ſplendor of the palace.

CHORUS.

Covet not that; the nobleſt proof of love
That Athelwold can give, is ſtill to guard

Your tender beauties from the blasting taint
Of courtly gales! The delicate soft tints
Of snowy innocence, the crimson glow
Of blushing modesty, these buds fly off,
And leave the soiled face no nobler bust
Than well-rang'd, lifeless features. Ah, Elfrida,
Should you be drawn'd, which happier fate forbid!
To drag your hours thro' all that nauseous scene
Of pageantry and vice, your purer breast,
True to its virtuous ruffle, soon would heave
A fervent sigh for innocence and Harewood.

ELFRIDA.

You much mistake me, Virgins; the throng'd palace
Were undesir'd by me, did not that palace
Detain my Athelwold. If he was here,
His presence would convert this range of oaks
To stately columns; these gay liv'ried flow'rs
To troops of gallant ladies; and yon deer,
That jutt their antlers forth in sportive fray,
To armed knights at joust or tournament.
If Athelwold dwelt here; if no ambition
Could lure his steps from love, and this still forest;
If I might never mean his time of absence,
Longer than that which serv'd him for the chace
Or of the wolf, or stag; or when he bore
The hood-wink'd falcon forth; might these, my
Virgins,

And theſe alone, be love's ſhort intervals,
I ſhould not have one thought remote from Harewood.

CHORUS.

And would you wiſh that Athelwold ſhould ſlight
The weal of England, and on theſe light toys
Waſte his unvalued hours? No, fond Elfrida;
His full-plum'd ſoul is wing'd for nobler flights:
There let it ſoar, nor, like the lofty lark,
That rides the ſun-beam warbling, ſudden drop
And rooſt itſelf in the low earthy furrow.

ELFRIDA.

What then, muſt England's welfare hold my Earl
For ever from theſe ſhades?

CHORUS.

We ſay not that.
The youth, who baths in pleaſure's limpid ſtream
At well-judg'd intervals, feels all his ſoul
Nerv'd with recruited ſtrength; but if too oft
He ſwims in ſportive mazes thro' the flood,
It chills his languid virtue. For this cauſe
Your Earl forbids, that theſe inchanting groves,
And their fair miſtreſs ſhould poſſeſs him wholly.
He knows he has a country and a king,
That claim his firſt attention; yet be ſure,
'Twill not be long, ere his unbending mind
Shall ſeek a ſoft aſylum from thoſe cares,
Amid th' embow'ring ſhades that veil Elfrida.

ELFRIDA.

O be that ſpeech prophetic; may he ſoon
Seek theſe embow'ring ſhades! Meanwhile, my friends,
Tune ſome harmonious lay, whoſe melting notes
Flow in ſuch ſprightly deſcant as may ſpeed
The lazy hours, that now move ſlowly on
With dull and flagging pinion. For ſweet muſic
Has got a magic ſpell to aid their flight,
And make them ſkim thro' their diurnal round
Swift as the ſwallow circles. Come, ye Virgins,
Ye have been nurs'd amid yon Cambrian rocks,
Where yet Poſterity retains ſome vein
Of that old minſtrelſy, which whilom breath'd
Thro' each time-honor'd grove of Britiſh oak.
There, where the ſpreading conſecrated boughs
Fed the ſage miſletoe, the holy Druids
Lay rapt in moral muſings; while the Bards
Call'd from their wiry harps ſuch ſolemn airs,
As drew down Fancy from the realms of Light
To paint ſome radiant viſion on their minds,
Of high myſterious import. Virgins, wake
Some ſtrain as ſweetly ſoothing. I, reclin'd
On yonder neighb'ring bank, will watch his coming.

[*Exit Elfrida.*

CHORUS.

ODE.

The Turtle tells her plaintive tale,
Sequeſter'd in ſome ſhadowy vale;
The Lark in radiant æther flotes,
And ſwells his wild extatic notes:
Meanwhile on yonder hawthorn ſpray
The Linnet wakes her temp'rate lay;
She haunts no ſolitary ſhade,
She flutters o'er no ſun-ſhine mead,
No love-lorn griefs depreſs her ſong,
No raptures lift it loudly high,
But ſoft ſhe trills, amid th' aerial throng,
Smooth ſimple ſtrains of ſob'reſt harmony.

Sweet Bird! like thine our lay ſhall flow,
Nor gayly loud, nor ſadly low;
For to thy note ſedate, and clear,
CONTENT ſtill lends a liſt'ning ear.
Reclin'd this moſſy bank along,
Oft has ſhe heard thy eaſy ſong:
Why hears not now? What fairer grove
From Harewood lures her devious love?
What fairer grove than Harewood knows,
More woodland walks, more fragrant gales,

More woodbine bowers, inviting ſoft repoſe,
More ſtreams flow-wand'ring thro' her winding vales.

Perhaps to ſome lone cave the Rover flys,
Where lull'd in pious peace the Hermit lies.
For, ſcorning oft the gorgeous hall,
Where banners wave with blazon'd gold,
There will the meek-ey'd Nymph delight to call,
And with the ſolemn Seer high converſe hold.
There, Goddeſs, on the ſhaggy mound,
Where tumbling torrents roar around,
Where pendant mountains o'er your head
Stretch their formidable ſhade;
You liſten, while the holy Seer
Slowly chaunts his veſpers clear;
Or of his ſparing meſs partake,
The ſav'ry pulſe, the wheaten cake,
The bev'rage cool of limpid rill.
Then, riſing light, your hoſt you bleſs,
And o'er his ſaintly temples bland diſtill
Seraphic day-dreams of heaven's happineſs.

Where'er thou art, enchanting Maid,
Thou ſoon wilt ſmile in Harewood's ſhade:
Soon will thy fairy feet be ſeen,
Printing this dew-impearled green;
Soon ſhall we mark thy geſtures meek,
Thy glitt'ring eye, and dimpled cheek,
What time thou ſeek'ſt, with willing haſte,
Thy lov'lieſt throne, Elfrida's breaſt.
There ſeated on that iv'ry ſhrine,
Where all the Loves and Graces lye,
With them your hands ſhall mutual chaplets twine,
And weave immortal wreaths of peace and joy.

And, hark, compleating our prophetic ſtrain,
The fleet hoof rattles o'er the flinty plain;
Now nearer, and now nearer ſounds.
Avaunt! ye vain, deluſive Fears.
Hark! Echo tells thro' Harewood's ampleſt bounds,
That Love, Content, and Athelwold appears.

ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

Look ever thus; with that bright glance of joy
Thus alway meet my tranſports. Let theſe arms
Thus ever fold me; and this cheek, that blooms
With all health's op'ning roſes, preſs my lips,
Warm as at this bleſt moment.

ELFRIDA.

Athelwold,
I had prepar'd me many a ſtern rebuke;
Had arm'd my brow with frowns, and taught my eye
Th' averted glance of coldneſs, which might beſt
Greet ſuch a loit'ring lover; but I find,
'Twas a vain taſk; for this my truant heart
Forgets each leſſon, which reſentment taught,
And in thy ſight knows only to be happy.

ATHELWOLD.

My beſt Elfrida—Heav'ns! It cannot laſt.
The giddy height of joy, to which I'm lifted,
Is as a hanging rock, at whoſe low foot
The black and beating ſurge of Infamy
Rolls ready to receive, and ſink my ſoul.

ELFRIDA.

So ſoon to fall into this muſing mood—
I thought, my Lord, you promis'd you would leave

These cares behind at court. Nay, 'twas the cauſe
Aſſign'd for this my reſidence at Harewood,
That you might never come to theſe fond arms,
But with a breaſt devoid of public toil,
And fill'd alone with rapture and Elfrida.
Said you not ſo? Why then that penſive look,
That down-caſt eye, that ſettled muſing poſture?
Surely the City's din, and this ſtill foreſt
Have loſt their diff'rence. Wherefore ſtay I here?
I'll with you to the palace.

ATHELWOLD.

Heav'n forbid!

ELFRIDA.

Nay, my beſt Lord, I meant it but in ſport;
For ſhould you bid me quit theſe blooming lawns,
For ſome bare heath, or drear unpeopled deſert;
Believe me, I would think its wildneſs Eden,
If Athelwold with frequent viſitation
Endear'd the ſavage ſcene: but yet I fear
My Father.

ATHELWOLD.

Hah! why him?

ELFRIDA.

You know his temper;
How jealous of his rank, and his trac'd lineage
From royal anceſtry. I fear me much,

He will not brook you ſhould conceal me long
In this lone privacy: No, he will deem it
Far unbecoming her, whoſe veins are fill'd
With the rich ſtream of his nobility.
Should it be ſo, his hot and fiery nature,
I doubt, will blaze, and do ſome dreadful outrage.

ATHELWOLD.

He need not know it, or, if chance he ſhould,
It matters not, if ſo this foreſt life
Seem of your own adoption and free choice.
And that it will ſo ſeem, I truſt. That love,
Which ever yet has ſiled my wayward will
With pleas'd compliance, and unaſk'd aſſent.

ELFRIDA.

And ever ſhall: yet blame me not, my Lord,
If prying womanhood ſhould prompt a wiſh
To learn the cauſe of this your ſtrange commotion,
Which ever wakes, if I but drop one thought
Of quitting Harewood.

ATHELWOLD.

Go to the clear ſurface
Of yon unruffled lake, and, bending o'er it,
There read my anſwer.

ELFRIDA.

Theſe are riddles, Sir—

ATHELWOLD.

No; for its glaſſy and reflecting ſurface
Will ſmile with charms too tempting for a palace.

ELFRIDA.

Does Athelwold diſtruſt Elfrida's faith?

ATHELWOLD.

No: but he much diſtruſts Elfrida's beauty.

ELFRIDA.

Away: you trifle.

ATHELWOLD.

Never more in earneſt;
I would not for the throne which Edgar ſits on,
That Edgar ſhould behold it.

ELFRIDA.

What, my Lord,
Think you the face, that caught your ſingle heart,
Will make all hearts its captives? Vain ſurmize.
Yet grant it could; the face is yours alone:
Not Edgar's ſelf would dare to ſeize it from you.
Edgar's a king, and not a tyrant.

ATHELWOLD.

True,
Edgar's a king, a juſt one; his firm feet
Walk ever in the fore-right road of honor:
Nor do I know what lure can draw his ſteps
Devious from that ſtraight path, ſave only one:

That tempting lure is beauty. Ah! Elfrida,
Throw but the dazz'ling bait within his view,
The untam'd wolf does not with fiercer rage
Burſt the ſlight bondage of the ſilken net,
Than he the ties of law. Late, very late,
Smit caſually with young Matilda's face,
He ſtrait commanded her reluctant Mother
To yield her to his arms: nor had ſhe 'ſcap'd
The violating fervor of his love,
Had not the prudent dame ſuborn'd her handmaid,
To take the unchaſt office, and be led
Veil'd in the maſk of night, to Edgar's chamber,
A counterfeit Matilda. As it chanc'd,
The damſel pleas'd the king, nor did detection
A whit abate his fondneſs; he forgave
The prudent mother, eas'd Matilda's fears,
And led the wanton minſtrel to his court,
Where ſtill ſhe ſhares——

CHORUS.

Behold, Earl Athelwold,
A meſſenger arrives; his ſpeed and aſpect
Speak ſome important errand.

EDWIN, ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

How now, Edwin?

EDWIN.

The King, my Lord, is on his way to Harewood.

ATHELWOLD.

The King!

EDWIN.

His purpoſe is to paſs thro' Mercia;
And in a haſty meſſage, ſome two hours
After you left the palace, this his pleaſure
Was ſent you by Lord Seofrid; withall
Commanding your attendance. You being abſent,
He ſtraitway turn'd his courſe thro' this fair foreſt,
Meaning to chaſe the Stag; his train is ſmall,
As was his purpoſe ſudden.

ELFRIDA.

Good my Lord,
Why thus perplex'd?

CHORUS.

Heav'ns! what a deep Deſpair
Sits on his brow.

ELFRIDA.

The notice ſure is ſhort;
But that's a trifle, a ſmall train requires
The ſmaller preparation: Let him come.

ATHELWOLD.

Yes, let him come: So thou wilt ſay, Elfrida,
When thou haſt heard my tale. Yes, let him come:
So wilt thou ſay, and let thy huſband periſh.
Yet ſhall theſe arms once more embrace thee cloſely,
Ere yet thou fly them as the pois'nous adder.
'Tis o'er: in that embrace Elfrida's Love
Was burried; and in that embrace, the Peace
Of wretched Athelwold.

ELFRIDA.

What may this be!

ATHELWOLD.

O Edwin, Edwin, when ſurviving Malice
Shall prey upon the Fame of thy dead Maſter,
Wilt thou not ſomeway ſtrive to check the Feind's
Inſatiate fury? Wilt thou ſee my name
Defil'd, and blacken'd with Detraction's venom,
And bear it patiently!

ELFRIDA.

What means my beſt—

ATHELWOLD.

Peace; not a word of Beſt, or Lov'd, or Dear:
Theſe are not titles now for thee to uſe,
Or me to triumph in. Virgins, retire;
We would awhile be private. Nay, return,

Concealment would be vain; and ye and Edwin,
Are bound to me. Albina! as for you,
I ſav'd your father, when his blood was forfeit.

CHORUS.

Not I, great Earl, alone, but all this train
Are bound by ev'ry tye of faith and love
To gen'rous Athelwold; to that mild maſter,
Who never forc'd our ſlavery to one act,
But of ſuch liberal ſort, as Freedom's ſelf
Would ſmilingly perform.

ATHELWOLD.

It may be ſo,
But where's the tye, Elfrida, that may bind
Thy faith and love.

ELFRIDA.

The ſtrongeſt ſure, my Lord,
The golden, nuptial tye. Try but its ſtrength.

ATHELWOLD.

I muſt perforce this inſtant. Know, Elfrida,
Once, on a day of high feſtivity,
The youthful king, encircled with his Nobles,
Crown'd high the ſpark'ling bowl; and much of Love,
Of Beauty much the ſprightly converſe ran.
When, as it well might chance, the briſk Lord Ardulph

Made gallant note of Orgar's peerleſs daughter,
And in ſuch phraſe as might enflame a breaſt
More cool than Edgar's. Early on the morrow
Th' impatient Monarch gave me ſwift commiſſion
To view thoſe charms, of which Lord Ardulph's tongue
Had giv'n ſuch warm deſcription: To whoſe words
If my true eye gave credence and aſſent,
I had his royal mandate on the inſtant
To hail you Queen of England.

ELFRIDA.

'Stead of which
You came, and hail'd me Wife of Athelwold.
Was this the tale I was ſo taught to fear?
Was this the deed, that known would make me fly
Thy claſping arm, as 'twere the poiſnous adder?
No, let this tender, fond embrace aſſure thee,
That thy Elfrida's love can never dye;
Or if it could, this animating touch
Would ſoon rewake it into life and rapture.

ATHELWOLD.

Doſt thou then pardon me? Come, injur'd ſovereign,
Plunge deep thy ſword of juſtice in this breaſt,
And I will dye contented.

ELFRIDA.

Heav'n forbid!
What can be done?

CHORUS.

Indeed, ye conſtant pair,
'Tis fit ye ſtrive to fly the coming danger.
For Safety now ſits wav'ring on your Love,
Like the light down upon the Thiſtle's beard
Which ev'ry breeze may part. Say, noble Earl,
What feint was us'd to lull the king's impatience?

ATHELWOLD.

Soon as theſe ſhades had veil'd my beauteous bride,
I haſted back to Edgar, laugh'd at Ardulph,
And talk'd of Elfrid, as of vulgar beauties;
Own'd no uncommon light'ning in her eye,
No breaſt that ſham'd the ſnow, or cheek the roſe.
The ſprightly King believ'd me, and forgot her.

CHORUS.

But an alliance, great as Athelwold's
With Orgar's daughter, ſoon would blaze abroad,
The theme of popular converſe.

ATHELWOLD.

True, it would;
And for that reaſon, when I laſt was here,
The King was taught I went to wed Elfrida.

ELFRIDA.

How ſo, my Lord?

ATHELWOLD.

Thy Father, my Elfrida,
Has rich poſſeſſions: Theſe, and theſe alone,
I made my theme of Love; and told the king,
That tho' thy face (pardon the impious falſhood)
Boaſted not charms to grace a Monarch's throne,
Yet would thy dow'r well ſuit his miniſter.
I therefore meant to aſk thee of thy father,
And (that my want of ſkill in choice might 'ſcape
All cenſure) hide thee cloſe in Harewood caſtle.
Edgar with ſmiles conſented, and, I think,
Harbours no thought of my diſloyalty.

ELFRIDA.

If ſo, what danger now?

ATHELWOLD.

Aſk'ſt thou, what danger?
'Sdeath, will that glance not inſtantly proclaim
My tenfold treachery?

ELFRIDA.

He ſhall not ſee me.
I'll hide me inſtant in ſome ſecret chamber,
And robe this virgin in my bridal veſtments.

ATHELWOLD.

Thy Love, like balm, runs trick'ling o'er the wounds
Of my torn boſom; yet 'tis vain, 'tis vain;

Thou muſt thy ſelf appear, for Ardulph ever
Attends the king, and would detect the fraud.

ELFRIDA.

If ſo, yet ſtill I can enſure our ſafety;
For as you fear my ſoftneſs of complexion,
I'll ſtain it with the juice of duſky leaves,
Or yellow berries, which this various wood
From tree or ſhrub will yield me. Theſe I'll uſe,
And form a thouſand methods to conceal
The little gleams of grace, which Nature lent me.
Fear not my caution.

ATHELWOLD.

Gent'leſt, beſt of Creatures,
Go, do then as thy tender care directs.
And yet how vain? What wond'rous art can ſteal
The liquid lightnings from thoſe radiant eyes,
Or rob the wavy ringlets of that hair
Of all their nameleſs graces? Say it could,
Yet would that modeſt, but majeſtic mien,
That inborn dignity of ſoul, which breaths
Thro' each angelic geſture, ſtill remain
To ſeiſe the heart of Edgar. Reſt, Elfrida,
Reſt as thou art, in all that blaze of beauty:
I muſt ſubmit to my juſt lot and loſe thee.

ELFRIDA.

Away, my Lord, with theſe too timid ſcruples:
Fear not my carriage; I will ſtoop my head,
Drawl out an idiot phraſe, and do each act
With ev'n a rude and peaſant aukwardneſs.

EDWIN.

Ere this, my Lord, I think, the King has reach'd
The full midway; 'twere fit you ſtood prepar'd
To give him meeting.

ATHELWOLD.

Give him meeting, Edwin!
Alaſs, I have no maſk to veil my baſeneſs.
When deep contrition ſhadows all my ſoul,
I cannot dreſs my features in light ſmiles,
And look the thing I am not. No, theſe eyes
Are not as yet true vaſſals to my purpoſe,
As yet indeed I am but half a villain.

ELFRIDA.

You weigh this matter in too nice a balance.
Your crime, my Lord, is but the the crime of love:
Thouſands like you have fail'd.

ATHELWOLD.

Millions have broke
That faith for beauty: and if beauty's beam
Could blanch the ſtains of Falſhood, that bright glance

Would change the ebon darkneſs of my crime
To whiteſt Innocence. But oh! it cannot;
Ev'n while I gaze upon it, Conſcience tells me
I ought not to have wrong'd the beſt of maſters.——
But thou art mine, and as thou art, Elfrida,
I will or die or keep thee.

ELFRIDA.

Live, or die,
I'm thine alike. Death cannot ought abate,
Or life augment, my love. Let this embrace
Be witneſs of my truth.

ATHELWOLD.

It ſhall, it ſhall:
Thy ev'ry word and look declares thee faithful,
Secure of all thy love, and all thy prudence,
Returning confidence has arm'd my ſoul
For this dread meeting: reſting on thy truth
I go——

Exit Athelwold.

ELFRIDA.

Go, and thy guardian ſaint preſerve thee,
Show'r bleſſings vaſt as would my laviſh love,
Had I his power to bleſs thee!

CHORUS.

Yes, my Siſters,
The ſilent awe that reigns thro' all your train,

Befits ye well. Let no unhallow'd tongue
Dare to profane her virtue by its praiſe.
'Tis a bright prodigy, which Admiration
Muſt ſtand in ſilent gaze at, and behold
Full-plum'd Perfection take its eagle flight
Above Ambition, Sov'reignty, and Pride;
Above-----

ELFRIDA.

What could Ambition to a heart
So fill'd with love as mine? If my late act
Had ought of noble and ſuperiour grace,
Impute it all to Love, to virtuous Love,
Than which what paſſion more impels the mind
To fair and gen'rous action? But the hours
Are precious now. I'll to yon neighb'ring grove:
There grows an azure flow'r, I oft have mark'd it,
Which ſtains the preſſing finger, with a juice
Of duſky, yellow tinct: its name I know not.
I'll fetch and try it ſtrait. Wait my return.

Exit Elfrida.

CHORUS.

ODE.

Whence does this ſudden Luſtre riſe,
That gilds the grove? Not like the noontide beam,
Which ſparkling dances on the trembling ſtream,
Nor the blue lightning's flaſh ſwift-ſhooting thro' the ſkies.
But ſuch a ſolemn ſteady Light,
As o'er the cloudleſs azure ſteals,
When Cynthia riding on the brow of night,
Stops in their mid carreer her ſilver wheels.

Whence can it riſe, but from the ſober power
Of CONSTANCY? She, heav'n-born Queen,
Deſcends, and in this woodbine-veſted bower,
Fixes her ſteadfaſt reign:
Steadfaſt, as when her high command
Gives to the ſtarry band
Their radiant Stations in heav'n's ample plain.
Stedfaſt, as when around this nether ſphere,
She winds the purple year.
Tells what time the Snow-drop cold
Its maiden whiteneſs may unfold,
When the golden harveſt bend,
When the ruddy fruits deſcend

Then bids pale Winter wake, to pour
The pearly hail's tranſlucent ſhow'r,
To caſt his ſilv'ry mantle o'er the woods,
And bind in cryſtal chains the ſlumb'ring floods.

The Soul, which ſhe inſpires, has pow'r to climb
To all the heights ſublime
Of Virtue's tow'ring hill.
That hill, at whoſe low foot weak-warb'ling ſtrays
The ſcanty ſtream of human praiſe,
A ſhallow trickling rill.
While on the Summits hov'ring Angels ſhed,
From their bleſt pinions, the nectareous dews
Of rich immortal Fame: From theſe the Muſe
Oft ſteals ſome precious drops, and blends with art
With thoſe the lower ſtreams impart;
Then ſhowr's it all on ſome high-favor'd head.
But thou, Elfrida, claim'ſt the genuine dew;
Thy worth demands it all,
Pure, and unmixt on thee the ſacred drops ſhall fall.

Elfrida returns with flowers.

ELFRIDA, ORGAR, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA. [*looking on the flower*]

'Tis ſtrange, my Virgins, this ſweet child of Summer,
Silken and ſoft, whoſe breath perfumes the air,
Whoſe gay veſt paints the Morn, ſhould in its boſom
Hide ſuch pollution! Yet 'tis often thus;
All are not as they ſeem.

ORGAR.

Yet hear me, Lady.

ELFRIDA.

Begone, unmanner'd Stranger, nor purſue me;
Hence, from the grove. Know ye this Pilgrim, Virgins?
On my return I met him here.

CHORUS.

Alaſs;
He came at break of day, and told a tale,
That mov'd our pity—But I fear me now,
'Twas falſe; ſome ſpy perchance, and may have heard—

ORGAR.

I have; yet not for that are you betray'd.
Fair Excellence, my heart is bound unto you,
I feel a tender intereſt in your welfare,
Tender as Fathers feel.

ELFRIDA.

As Fathers feel;
That well-known voice, and ah! that look——

ORGAR.

Elfrida!

ELFRIDA.

Yes, it is he, it is my Father, Virgins.
Support me, or I faint! O wherefore, Sir?——

ORGAR.

Take courage, Daughter; my parental fondneſs
Prompted this viſit. Thus I came diſguis'd,
To learn the cauſe of my dear child's confinement;
And I have learnt it.

ELFRIDA.

Then all's loſt for ever.

ORGAR.

Thou know'ſt, Elfrida, next my houſe's honor,
Thy peace has ever been my deareſt care.
But ſuch an inſult—No! I cannot brook it.
So black a fraud! By all my anceſtors,
By Offa's ſhade, I will have ample vengeance.

ELFRIDA.

Alaſs, I know too well your dreadful purpoſe.
I knew it at the firſt. Yes, he muſt fall.

Yet pardon me, if my poor trembling heart
Puts up I know not what of pray'rs and vows
To ev'ry pitying ſaint, Celeſtial Guardians
Of nuptial Conſtancy! O bend from heav'n
Your ſtar-crown'd heads, and hear a wretched woman,
That begs ye ſave, from a dread father's rage,
Her lord, her huſband.

ORGAR.

Huſband! 'Sdeath what huſband?
Is Athelwold thy huſband? Sooner call
Th' impeached thief true maſter of the booty
He ſtole, or murder'd for. Diſdain the Villain;
And help me to revenge thee.

CHORUS.

Think, great Earl,
What ſanctimonious ties reſtrain your daughter.
Did ſhe not ſwear before the hallow'd ſhrine
Eternal fealty to this her Lord?
Yet ſay, that he deceiv'd her; ſhall her truth
Dare to revenge? No, Sir, in higheſt heav'n
Vengeance mid ſtorms and tempeſts ſits enſhrin'd,
Veſted in robes of light'ning, and there ſleeps,
Unwak'd but by th' incens'd Almighty's call.
O, let not Man preſume to take unbid
That dread vicegerency.

ORGAR.

Peace, Virgins, peace.
The ſaws of Druids, or the chaunt of Bards,
Have little weight with me, when inſults high
Rouſe my juſt indignation. Hear me, Daughter,
You went to ſearch for flow'rs, to blot your charms
With their dun hue. Yes, you may ſearch for flow'rs,
Yet ſhall they be the loveliеſt of the ſpring:
Flow'rs, that entangling in your auburn hair,
Or bluſhing mid the whiteneſs of your boſom,
May, to the power of ev'ry native grace,
Give double life, and luſtre. Haſte, My child,
Array thyſelf in thy moſt gorgeous garb,
And ſee each jewel, which my Love procur'd thee,
Dart its full radiance. More than all, put on
The nobler ornament of winning ſmiles,
And kind inviting glances.

ELFRIDA.

Never, never;
When this true heart renounces Athelwold,
May equitable heav'n.——

ORGAR.

Nay, ſwear not, Elfrid;
But with a duteous, and attentive Ear,
Liſten to my perſuaſions. Much I wiſh
Perſuaſions might prevail, that not compell'd

To uſe a Father's juſt prerogative,
My will may meet with thy unforc'd obedience.
Follow me, on thy duty.

ELFRIDA.

Cruel Father,
That duty ſhall obey you; I will follow:
Yet not to quit my Love. So Mercy ſhield me,
As I hold true to Athelwold!

Exeunt Orgar and Elfrida.

SEMICHORUS.

Horror! Horror!
The Pen of Fate dipt in it's deepeſt gall,
Perhaps on that ill-omen'd wall,
Now writes th' event of this tremendous day.
O! that our weaker ſight
Could read the myſtic characters, and ſpy
What to the unpurg'd, mortal Eye,
Is hid in endleſs Night.

SEMICHORUS.

Suſpenſe! thou frozen gueſt, be gone.
The wretch, whoſe rugged bed
Is lin'd with thorns, more ſoftly reſts his head,
Than he who ſinks amid the cycnet's down,
If thou tormenting feind be nigh,
To prompt his ſtarting tear, his ceaſeleſs ſigh,
His wiſh, his pray'r, his vow for ling'ring certainty.

CHORUS.

But hark! that certainty arrives! Methought,
I heard the winding horn. I did not err;
The King is near at hand. This quick approach
Will ſure prevent this proud Earl's cruel purpoſe.
Yet what of that? Does her fair form require
The blazon of rich veſture? Genuine beauty
Nor aſks, nor needs it: Negligence alone
Is its bright diadem, and artleſs eaſe
Its robe of Tyrian tincture. Say, my Siſters,
Shall we ſalute this Monarch with a hymn
Of Feſtival and Joy! Alaſs, ſuch joy
Ill ſuits our trembling hearts, and weeping Eyes.
And now 'twere vain; for ſee, the King approaches.

EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, CHORUS.

EDGAR.

No, Athelwold; not from a partial blindneſs,
Or for the mode and guiſe of courteſy,
Are we thus large in praiſe; in our true judgment,
This caſtle is not more kind Nature's debtor
For this its happy ſite, than 'tis to thee
For that juſt ſymmetry, and modeſt ſkill
Which decks the general ſtructure. Not a frieze,
Or moulded pediment, but in its parts
Claims kindred with the whole; for Ornament

Is here the offspring of Neceſſity,
Not the vain flouriſh of unmeaning art.

[*ſeeing the Chorus.*]

But ah! what nobler beauties catch mine eye.
Thy caſtle's beauty, my lov'd Athelwold,
Has ampleſt proof, in having pow'r to hold
Mine Eye from ſuch a proſpect. Pardon, fair ones;
To take your graces thus at ſecond note
Was ſure uncommon blindneſs.

ATHELWOLD.

Heav'ns! they weep.
What may this mean? Some dread and unſeen chance
Has counterwork'd my ſafety.

EDGAR.

Whence this ſilence;
Why are your lovely Heads thus bow'd with ſadneſs?
Beſhrew my heart, my Lords, but this is ſtrange.
I know thee, Earl, and know thy gentleneſs,
More prone t'obey, than lord it o'er the ſex;
Elſe ſhould I gueſs this ſorrow had its riſe,
From ſome diſcourteous treatment.

CHORUS.

No, dread Sov'reign;
He is the nobleſt, gentleſt, beſt of maſters;
And may your Love reward——

ORGAR, ATHELWOLD, EDGAR, CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

Death to my hopes!

ORGAR.

Yes, Villain, ſtart; but let this vengeful arm
Arreſt thy baſeneſs; would to heav'n its ſtrength
Thus graſping thee, could open thy falſe breaſt,
And bare thy heart to the ſham'd eye of Day.

EDGAR.

Patience, hot Man. What art thou?

ORGAR.

I am Orgar——
Pardon me, Prince; that this my honeſt rage
O'erleaps obedient duty. I am wrong'd,
Yet that's but ſmall; 'tis not my private wrongs
But yours, much-injur'd prince, that call for juſtice.
Yes, Sir, I here on a true ſubjects oath,
Proclaim Earl Athelwold a faithleſs traytor.

EDGAR.

Ha! what is this? Renounce the word, old Earl;
Thy length of years hath forc'd thee, ſure, to preſs
The verge of dotage. Athelwold! what Athelwold!
A faithleſs traytor? Periſh the ſuſpicion.

Never before did word, or thought, or look,
Give doubt of his diſtinguiſh'd loyalty.
Dotage alone could frame the accuſation.

ORGAR.

I do not dote, thank Heav'n, my faculties
Are yet my own, unblemiſh'd and unhurt.
Would ſo my Daughter were!

EDGAR.

What is his drift?

ATHELWOLD.

Better my royal Lord you markt him not;
The wayward Earl is——

ORGAR.

What, audacious Villain!
I will be heard.

EDGAR.

Go to, thou choleric Lord.

ORGAR.

When thou haſt heard me, King, then call me choleric.

EDGAR.

Speak then and briefly.

ORGAR.

Once my ſacred Liege,
I had a daughter, duteous as e'er crown'd
A Father's wiſh, and lovely as could warm
A youth to am'rous tranſports. This, my Lord,
You learnt long ſince from noble Ardulph's praiſes,
And fir'd with his deſcription, ſent this Earl,
This faithful Earl, t'invite her to your throne.

EDGAR.

No, Orgar, not t'invite her to our throne,
Simply to note her beauty was his errand.

ORGAR.

Yes, he did note it, ſtampt it for his own.
But why this parley? Enter, Sir, theſe gates,
And let Elfrida's features be the book,
Where you may read the ſtory of his falſhood,
E'en at one glance.

EDGAR.

Lead on then, noble Lord.
We'll follow to the tryal. I will humour
The Earl's hot temper. He has heard, my friend,
We meant t'exalt his daughter, and for that,
His partial fondneſs, link'd with his ambition,
Levels this rage at thee. Attend us, Lords.

Exeunt Edgar, Orgar, &c.

CHORUS, ATHELWOLD.

CHORUS.

My Lord, the King is enter'd: ſtand not thus
In ſtatue-like Diſtreſs.

ATHELWOLD.

Away, away;
What! can a Man that thinks ſuch thoughts as I do
Have pow'r of act, and motion? ſpeak to me;
Inform me all. What ſaid ſhe, when I left her?
How came her Father hither? how did ſhe
Greet his arrival? Say, was ſhe compell'd,
Or did her free, and voluntary voice
Tell all the ſtory? Did ſhe marſhall him,
To this his deed of vengeance?

CHORUS.

Deareſt Maſter;
Elfrida told him not: his own deceit
Was his informer. Here the Earl arriv'd
Early at morn, in mean and pilgrim weeds,
All like an antient, toil-worn traveller;
And with a tale told in ſuch piteous ſtrain,
Fraught with ſuch ſad and moving circumſtance,
With woes ſo well diſſembled; that our ſoftneſs,
Suffer'd him enter this cloſe bower for reſt,
Which he adapting to his prying purpoſe,

Thence learnt the ſecret. This our diſobedience,
We own——

ATHELWOLD.

Was my perdition, yet 'tis well;
I blame ye not; it was the work of Fate.
Fate brought him hither, Fate annull'd your faith.
I do not think, you purpos'd my deſtruction;
But yet you have deſtroy'd me. O Elfrida,
And art thou faithful? This my jealous eye
Thought it had markt ſome ſpeck of change upon thee;
Thought it had found, what might have made thy loſs
Somewhat within endurance. 'Tis not ſo;
And this thy purity but ſerves t'augment
The ſum of my diſtractions. Meet me, Edgar,
With thy rais'd ſword: be merciful and ſudden—

Exit Athelwold.

CHORUS.

ODE.

Say, will no white-rob'd Son of Light,
Swift-darting from his heav'nly height,
Here deign to take his hallow'd ſtand;
Here wave his amber locks, unfold
His pinions cloth'd with downy gold;
Here ſmiling ſtretch his tutelary wand?
And you, ye hoſt of Saints, for ye have known
Each dreary path in Life's perplexing maze,
Tho' now ye circle yon eternal throne
With harpings high of inexpreſſive praiſe,
Will not your train deſcend in radiant ſtate,
To break with Mercy's beam this gathering cloud of Fate?

'Tis ſilence all. No Son of Light
Darts ſwiftly from his heav'nly height,
No train of radiant Saints deſcend.
" Mortals, in vain ye hope to find,
" If guilt, if fraud has ſtain'd your mind,
" Or Saint to hear, or Angel to defend."
So TRUTH proclaims. I hear the ſacred ſound
Burſt from the centre of her burning throne.

Where aye ſhe ſits with ſtar-wreath'd luſtre crown'd,
A bright Sun claſps her adamantine zone.
So TRUTH proclaims: her awful voice I hear,
With many a ſolemn pauſe it ſlowly meets my ear.

" Attend, ye Sons of Men; attend, and ſay,
Does not enough of my refulgent ray
Break thro' the veil of your mortality!
Say, does not Reaſon in this form deſcry
Unnumber'd, nameleſs glories, that ſurpaſs
The Angel's floating pomp, the Seraph's glowing grace?

Shall then your earth-born daughters vie
With me? Shall ſhe, whoſe brighteſt eye
But emulates the diamond's blaze,
Whoſe boſom mocks the fleecy ſnow,
Whoſe cheek the roſe's damaſk glow,
Whoſe melting voice the warbling woodlark's lays;
Shall ſhe be deem'd my rival? Shall a form
Of elemental droſs, of mould'ring clay,
Vie with theſe charms imperial? The poor worm
Shall prove her conteſt vain. Life's little day
Shall paſs, and ſhe is gone: while I appear,
Fluſh'd with the bloom of youth thro' Heav'n's eternal year.

Know, Mortals, know; ere firſt ye ſprung,
Ere firſt theſe orbs in æther hung,
I ſhone amid the heav'nly throng.
Theſe eyes beheld Creation's day,
This voice began the choral lay,
And taught Archangels their triumphant ſong.
Pleas'd I ſurvey'd bright Nature's gradual birth,
Saw infant Light with kindling luſtre ſpread,
Soft vernal fragrance clothe the flow'ring earth,
And Ocean heave on his extended bed;
Saw the tall Oak aſpiring pierce the ſky,
The tawny Lion ſtalk, the rapid Eagle fly.

Laſt, Man aroſe, erect in youthful grace,
Heav'n's hallow'd image ſtampt upon his face,
And, as he roſe, the high beheſt was giv'n,
"That I alone of all the hoſt of heav'n,
"Should reign Protectreſs of the godlike Youth.
Thus the Almighty ſpake: he ſpake and call'd me TRUTH.

ATHELWOLD, EDWIN, CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

Baniſh me! No. I'll die. For why ſhould Life
Remain a lonely lodger in that breaſt
Which Honor leaves untenanted. Vain breath!
Thou ill can'ſt fill ſuch vacancy. Begone.
This ſword ſhall free——

CHORUS.

O ſhame to Fortitude!
Shame to that manly paſſion, which inſpires
Its vigrous warmth, when the bleak blaſts of Fate
Would chill the ſoul. O call the ready Virtue
Quick to thy aid, for ſhe is ever near thee,
Is ever prompt to ſpread her ſevenfold ſhield
O'er noble breaſts.

ATHELWOLD.

And but o'er noble breaſts;
Not o'er the breaſt which livid Infamy
Indelibly has ſpotted. O ſhame, ſhame.
Sword, rid me of the thought.

CHORUS.

Forbear, forbear;
Think what a ſea of deep perdition whelms
The wretch's trembling ſoul, who launches forth
Unlicenc'd to Eternity. Think, think,
And let the thought reſtrain thy impious hand.
The race of Man is one vaſt, marſhall'd army,
Whoſe num'rous ſquadrons fill the plains of Time,
Their leader the Almighty. High in air
That chos'n Archangel rides, whoſe right hand wields
Th' imperial ſtandard of his providence,
Which dreadly ſweeping thro' the vaulted ſky
O'er-ſhadows all Creation.

ATHELWOLD.

I was once——
Yes, I was once (I have his royal word for't)
A man of ſuch try'd faith, ſuch ſteady honor,
As mock'd all doubt and ſcruple.—What a change!
Now muſt that unſtain'd, virgin character
Be doom'd to groſs and hourly proſtitution
Sating the luſt of ſlander; and my wife,
My chaſt Elfrida! O diſtraction, no,
I'll fly to ſave her.

EDWIN.

Stay, my deareſt Maſter;
You ruſh on inſtant death.

ATHELWOLD.

I mean it, ſlave,
And would'ſt thou hinder me?

EDWIN.

Yes, Sir, I hold
'Tis duty to my king, and love to you,
Thus to oppoſe your entrance.

ATHELWOLD.

What thou traitor!
Thy pardon, Edwin, I forgot myſelf;
Forgot, that I ſtood here a baniſh'd Man,
And that this gate was ſhut againſt its Maſter.
And yet this gate leads to my dear Elfrida,
Can it be barr'd to me? O Earth, cold Earth,
Upon whoſe breaſt I caſt this load of mis'ry,
Bear it awhile; and you, ye aged Oaks,
Ye venerable Fathers of this wood,
Who oft have cool'd beneath your arching ſhades
My humble anceſtors, oft ſeen them hie
To your ſpread umbrage, from yon ſultry field,
Their ſcene of honeſt labor. Shade, ah! ſhade,

The laſt, the wretchedeſt of all their race.
I will not long pollute ye, for I mean
To pay beneath your conſecrated gloom
A ſacrifice to honor, and the ghoſts
Of thoſe progenitors, who ſternly frown
On me their baſe deſcendant.

EDWIN.

See, ye Virgins,
See how Deſpair beneath his ghaſtly brow
Stretches her blackeſt cloud, thro' whoſe thick night
His Eye faſt-rooted in their angry ſings
Dart a dire glare.

CHORUS.

Edwin, 'tis ever thus
With noble minds, if chance they ſlide to folly;
Remorſe ſtings deeper, and relentleſs Conſcience,
Pours more of gall into the bitter cup
Of their ſevere repentance.

ATHELWOLD.

'Tis reſolv'd,
I'll enter and demand a ſecond audience.
And yet how vain? Ere I can reach his ear,
His ready train will ſtop me, and with all
The cruel punctuality of office,
So prompt to act gainſt fallen favorites,
Diſmiſs me with reproof.——Surely I heard her.
Was't not Elfrida's voice? 'Tis ſhe herſelf.

ELFRIDA, EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, ORGAR, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

No, I will once more claſp him to my boſom.
I will not be withheld. I will o'ertake him,
Will follow him to exile. Hah, my Huſband!
So quickly found? They thought to tear me from thee,
But we will part no more.

EDGAR.

Take heed, Elfrida,
This ill-tim'd fondneſs may recall the fate
I juſt now freed him from; who loves like me
Can ill brook this. Or quit him, or he dies.

ATHELWOLD.

Yes, let me die! Death is my deareſt wiſh.
Quit me, Elfrida! leave me to my fate.
'Tis juſt, 'tis juſt. Thus to my ſov'reign's ſword
Freely I bare my breaſt. Strike, injur'd Prince;
But do not baniſh me.

ELFRIDA.

What, Athelwold,
Is then the life, on whoſe dear preſervation
Elfrida's peace depends, not worth the ſaving?

Die then. But e'er thy murderer ſtrikes the ſtroke,
Let me inform him, that his act deſtroys
No ſingle life.

EDGAR.

By heav'n, ſhe loves the traitor
Beyond all hope of change—

ELFRIDA.

No, Athelwold,
Thou ſhall not die. That pauſe in royal Edgar
Beſpeaks calm recollection and weigh'd thought,
And his relenting tongue ſhall quickly ſeal
Thy liberal pardon. Come, my Lord, let's kneel;
Now's the bleſt time; here let us kneel together,
And as theſe ſtreaming eyes and lifted hands
Employ each act of ſilent ſupplication,
Do thou recount——Ah! no, thy modeſt tongue
Could never tell ev'n half the gallant ſtory.
Be ſilent then. Let Edgar's ſelf reflect,
For well I know his Mem'ry writes thy Virtues
Upon its faireſt page. Yes, let him weigh
All thy paſt deeds of loyalty and faith,
'Gainſt this ſo light a fault.

EDGAR.

So light a fault!
Had he diſlodg'd my richeſt coffer'd treaſures,
Diſpers'd ſedition's poiſon 'mid my troops,
Or aim'd with daring and rebellious hand
To ſnatch theſe regal honors from my brow,
I ſooner could have pardon'd.

ATHELWOLD.

Ceaſe, Elfrida,
My doom is juſt—Yes, royal Sir, I'll go
To baniſhment. I do deſerve to breath,
Deſerve to bear this load of life about me
For many years; to lengthen out my age,
Liſtning the hourly knell of curſt remembrance,
Whoſe leaden ſtroke ſhall tell to my ſad ſoul
That I was faithful once.

ELFRIDA.

O flinty Edgar,
What! will this penitence not move thee? Know
There is a roſe-lip'd Seraph ſits on high,
Who ever bends his holy ear to earth
To mark the voice of Penitence, to catch
Her ſolemn ſighs, to tune them to his harp,

And echo them in harmonies divine
Up to the throne of grace. Ev'n Heav'n is won
By Penitence, and ſhall Heav'n's ſubſtitute,
Shall Edgar ſcorn——

EDGAR.

Ceaſe, ceaſe, thou beauteous pleader!
Ah far too beauteous! Wouldſt thou gain thy ſuit,
Why glows that vermeil lip? why rolls that Eye
Bright as the ray of Morn? Why in each geſture
Such inexpreſſive graces? Why, but becauſe
They're native all, and will not be conceal'd.
Elſe ſure each charm betrays him, and becomes
An advocate, whoſe ſilent eloquence
Pleads 'gainſt thy tongue, and foils its ſtrongeſt rhet'ric.
Traitor! was this the face which thy falſe tongue
Prophan'd as vulgar? This ſuch common beauty
As the fair eye of Day beheld each hour
In ev'ry clime he lighted? Baſe diſſembler,
This inſtant quit our realm.

ELFRIDA.

O ſtay thee, Edgar,
And once more hear me. At thy feet I fall
As earneſt, and diſtreſt a ſupplicant,
As e'er embrac'd the knees of Majeſty.

O ſpare thy Country's guardian, Edgar, ſpare
Thy cloſeſt, ſureſt friend. Let not one fault,
Cancell his thouſand, thouſand acts of faith.
Alas! I fall to vaineſt repetition.
Grief, whelming grief drowns all my faculties
And leaves me nought but tears.

EDGAR.

Riſe, riſe Elfrida.

ELFRIDA.

Shall he then live?

EDGAR.

He ſhall, he ſhall, my fair,
If ſo he quit the realm within the ſpace,
Our Sentence limited.

ELFRIDA.

O ſtop not there;
That ſentence will be death to Athelwold.
Think, for thou know'ſt full well his gentle nature,
Can he ſupport the rigour of this doom?
Can he who liv'd but in thy gracious ſmiles,
Who'd pine, if chance thoſe ſmiles a ſingle hour,
Were dealt him thriftily; Think can he bear
The infamy of exile?

EDGAR.

Hear me, Athelwold.
Did I not ſhow'r on thy much-favor'd head
My thickeſt honors, and with gift ſo ready
As out-run all requeſt? Did I not hold thee,
Still in ſuch open confidence of friendſhip?
Such love as——

ATHELWOLD.

Sooner ſtab me than repeat it.

EDGAR.

Yet give me hearing. I repeat not this
To taunt, or gall thee. On my ſoul, thy worth
Did o'ertop all thoſe honors, and thy zeal
Kept pace with my beſt love. Nor till this Deed——
But ſuch a deed! look there, look on that face.
Thou know'ſt me, Athelwold, haſt ſeen me gaze
On a ſoft yielding fair one, till mine Eye
Shot flames. Perdition ſeize me, Earl,
If I knew Love till now.

ATHELWOLD.

I ſee it plainly,
Nor ſay I ought to leſſen my offence.
No, here I kneel, Oh! caſt but on my mis'ry
One kind forgiving glance; this ready ſword
Shall expiate all.

ELFRIDA.

Ah! will you? muſt he die?

EDGAR.

No ſtay thee, Athelwold, and ſheath thy ſword,
I never yet (ſave but this hour of rage)
Deem'd thee my ſubject. Thou wert ſtill my friend,
And, injur'd as I am, thou ſtill art ſuch:
I do forego the word; to baniſh thee
Or ſeal thy death, tranſcends a friend's juſt right.

ELFRIDA.

It does, it does, ſurpaſſing goodneſs. Virgins,
The King will pardon him. Wake each high note
Of praiſe, and gratitude, teach Edgar's name
To Harewood's ſtilleſt Echo. O my Sov'reign,
What words can ſpeak——

EDGAR.

Ah, check theſe tranſports, Lady.
Leſt, if I ſee thee thus, my ſoul forget
Its fair reſolve. I'll leave thee on the inſtant.
Yet firſt my lips muſt preſs this gentle hand,
And breath one ſoft ſigh of no common fervor.
Now on, my Lords, — Fair wonder of thy ſex,
Adieu. We'll ſtrait unto our realm of Mercia.
Yet firſt, as was our purpoſe, thro' this foreſt

We'll chace the nimble Roebuck; may the ſport
More pleaſe us, than we hope. Earl Athelwold,
Thou too muſt join our train. Follow us ſtraight.

Exit Edgar, &c.

ATHELWOLD.

I do, my Liege. Elfrida, I have much
For thy lov'd ear, and have but one farewell
To tell it all—And yet—

ELFRIDA.

Ah loiter not,
It may enrage. Farewell. Be ſure, take heed
I come not in your talk, avoid ev'n thinking,
Check ev'n the ſighs of abſence. Haſte, my Earl,
Oh haſte thee, as thou lov'ſt thy conſtant wife.

——*Exit Athelwold.*

ORGAR, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ORGAR.

Thy conſtant Wife! ah, ſtain of all thy race,
Degen'rate Girl! Henceforth be Orgar deem'd
Of ſoft, and dove-like temper, who could ſee
A child of his ſtoop to ſuch vile abaſement,
And yet forbore juſt wrath; forbore to draw
That blood ſhe had defil'd from her mean veins.
But ſure thou art not mine, ſome Elve or Faye.

Did ſpirit away my babe, and by curſt charms
Thee in her cradle plac'd. Nay hang not on me.
Dry, dry thy tears, they've done their office amply.
Edgar has pardon'd him. No, by my Earldom
I cannot think of majeſty thus meanly.
He'll yet avenge it: What if chance he ſhould not?
That ſtops not me; I have a heart, an arm,
A ſword can do me juſtice.

ELFRIDA.

Ah! my Lord,
Are you ſtill mercileſs? Alas, I hop'd—

ORGAR.

What could'ſt thou hope, Elfrida? could'ſt thou think
I e'er would pardon his vile perfidy,
Or thy ignoble ſoftneſs?

ELFRIDA.

Deareſt Father,
Frown not thus ſternly on me. I would fain
Touch your relenting ſoul, fain win your heart
To fatherly forgiveneſs. For thro' life
I've oft had pleaſing proof how that forgiveneſs
Stoop'd to my fond perſuaſion. But I fear
Perſuaſion now has left me. My ſad thoughts
Are all on wing, all following Athelwold,
Like unſeen miniſtring ſpirits: —Pardon, Sir,

That frown ſhall check me, I'll not mention him;
I will but plead for my own weakneſs, plead
For that ſoft ſympathy of ſoul, which you
Deem baſe and ſervile. Baſe perhaps it might be,
Were I of bolder ſex. But I, alas!——
Ah pardon me, if Nature ſtampt me Woman;
Gave me a heart ſoft, gentle, prone to pity,
And very fearful. Fearful, ſure, with cauſe
At this dread hour, when if one hapleſs word,
One ſigh break forth unbidden, it may wake
The King's lull'd rage!—What has my phrenzy,
I've wander'd from my meaning. Deareſt Virgins,
My raſh tongue more inflames him. O aſſiſt me,
Ye are not thus oppreſt with inward horror;
Kneel, plead, perſuade, convince——

CHORUS.

Alas, my miſtreſs,
What may a ſervant's accents do t'appeaſe
This furious Earl.

ORGAR.

Ye well may ſpare them: Maidens,
Know my firm ſoul's reſolv'd, and be my heart
Abject as Athelwold's, if I forego
Its honeſt reſolution. Yes, I'll wait
The Earl's return, and in his own domain

Give him fair combat. I have known the time
When this good arm had hardihood enough
For thrice his proweſs. What is loſt thro' age,
My juſt cauſe ſhall ſupply; and he ſhall fall
As did the traytor Oſwald, whoſe falſe tongue
Defam'd me to King Athelſtan: To the ground
My ſharp launce nail'd the caitiff.

[*Exit Orgar.*

ELFRIDA CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

Think, my Lord,
Will Athelwold, will he enter thoſe liſts,
Where conqueſt would be parricide? Alas
He hears me not. Go, thou obdurate Man,
A daughter's tears will but the more provoke thee.
I will not follow him. No, poor Elfrida!
All thou canſt do is here to ſtand, and weep,
And feel that thou art wretched.

CHORUS.

Deareſt Miſtreſs,
Reſtrain this flood of tears, perhaps—

ELFRIDA.

Perhaps!
Ah! mock me not with hopes.

CHORUS.

We do not mean it:
For Hope, tho' 'tis pale Sorrow's only cordial,
Has yet a dull and opiate quality;
Enfeebling what it lulls. It ſuits not you,
For, as we fear---

ELFRIDA.

Do you too fear? Alas!
I flatter'd my poor ſoul that all its Fears,
Were Grief's diſtemper'd coinage, that my Love
Rais'd cauſeleſs apprehenſions, and at length
Edgar would quite forgive. I do bethink me,
My joy broke forth too raſhly. When they left us,
His ſafety was not half ſecur'd; my pleading
Was not half heard; I ſhould have follow'd Edgar,
Claim'd more full pardon, forc'd him to embrace
My ſorrowing Lord.

CHORUS.

We fear that ſorrow more
Than Edgar's rage. We fear his fallen Virtue.
Self-condemnation works moſt ſtrongly on him,
Ev'n to Deſpondency. Nay, at his pardon,
No joy flush'd on his cheek; we mark'd him well,
He ſhew'd no ſign of welcome. No, he took it
As who ſhould ſay, "to give me ought but Death,
"Is a poor boon unwiſh'd and unaccepted."
Too much we fear he'll do ſome impious Act---

ELFRIDA.

What, on his life? I thought I had explor'd
Each various face of danger: this eſcap'd me.
How miſt I this? It ſuits his courage highly;
Suits too his fixt remorſe.—But yet he will not,
No, Athelwold, thou wilt not kill Elfrida.

CHORUS.

O may his love preſerve him: may theſe ſhades
Receive him ſoon in peace. To this bleſt end
You ſure ſhould ſtrive to calm your Father's rage,
At leaſt not ſuffer him, as now, retir'd
To brood o'er his revenge. For Solitude,
Which ſooths the tranquil mind, has dread effects
On wrathful breaſts. The ſame ſequeſter'd Pine,
Which veils the gurgling Ringdove with its boughs,
Whets with its knotty trunk the Boar's vext tooth,
And points each fang with death.

ELFRIDA.

'Tis true, my Virgins;
Attend me then: I'll try each winning art,
(Tho' ill ſuch art becomes me) yet I'll aim it.—
Hark—whence that noiſe? I heard ſome haſty footſteps.

CHORUS.

O Heavens! 'tis Edwin.

ELFRIDA, EDWIN, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

Edwin, ah! that look
Beſpeaks too well the horror of thy errand.
Tell it me all.

EDWIN.

Alas!—

ELFRIDA.

Nay, do not pauſe.
Tell it me all. I think it will not kill me.
Repeat each circumſtance. I'm ready, Edwin,
Ev'n for the worſt.

EDWIN.

Then hear that worſt, Elfrida.
Soon as the ſtag had left yon weſtward thicket,
The King diſmiſt his Lords, each ſev'ral ways,
To their beſt ſport, bidding Earl Athelwold,
Lord Ardulph, and myſelf attend his perſon.
Thus parted from the reſt, the Monarch pierc'd
A darkling dell, which open'd in a Lawn
Thick ſet with elm around. Suddenly here
He turn'd his ſteed, and cry'd "This place befits
"Our purpoſe well."

ELFRIDA.

Purpoſe! what purpoſe, Edwin?
'Twas predetermin'd then, diſſembling tyrant!
How could I truſt, or hope—

EDWIN.

Yet give me hearing:
Thus with a grave compoſure, and calm eye
King Edgar ſpoke. Now hear me, Athelwold,
Thy king has pardon'd this thy trait'rous act;
From each committed ſin 'gainſt Majeſty
Thou ſtand'ſt full franchis'd; yet there ſtill remains
Somewhat to cancel more. As man to man,
As friend to friend, now, Athelwold, I call thee
Strait to defend thy life with thy good ſword.
Nay, anſwer not; defend it gallantly.
If thy arm proſper, this my dying tongue
Shall pardon thee, and bleſs thee. If thou fall'ſt,
Thy parting breath muſt to my right reſign
Elfrida's beauties. At the word, both drew,
Both fought, but Athelwold's was ill-play'd paſſion.
He aim'd his falchion at the Monarch's head,
Only to leave his own brave breaſt defenceleſs.
And the firſt ſtroke of Edgar's rapid ſword
Pierc'd my dear maſter's heart. He fell to earth,
And falling, cry'd, "This wound attones for all.
"Edgar thus full aveng'd will pardon me,
"And my true wife with chaſt, connubial tears
"Embalm my memory." He ſmil'd, and dy'd.

ELFRIDA.

Nay, come not round me, Virgins, nor ſupport me.
I do not ſwoon, nor weep. I call not heav'n

T'avenge my wretchedneſs. I do not wiſh
This tyrant's hand may wither with cold palſies.
No, I am very patient. Heav'n is juſt!
And, when the meaſure of his crimes are full,
Will bare its red right arm, and launce its light'nings.
Till then, ye elements, reſt: and thou, firm Earth,
Ope not thy yawning jaws, but let this Monſter
Stalk his due time on thine affrighted ſurface.
Yes; let him ſtill go on; ſtill execute
His ſavage purpoſes, and daily make
More widows weep, as I do. Fooliſh Eyes!
Why flow ye thus unbidden? What have tears
To do with grief like mine?

CHORUS.

Help, help, my Siſters,
To bear her to the caſtle.

ORGAR, ELFRIDA, EDWIN, CHORUS.

ORGAR.

As I paſt,
Methought I heard a ſound of loud lament:
Elfrida, ha!

ELFRIDA.

Is not my father there?
Withhold me not, I'll fall at his dear feet.
O Sir! behold your child thus lowly proſtrate;

Avenge her wrongs, avenge your poor Elfrida,
Your helpleſs widow'd Daughter.

ORGAR.

Widow'd Daughter!
What! is he ſlain?

ELFRIDA.

Inhoſpitably butcher'd;
The Tyrant's ſavage ſelf — Stand you thus cool?
Where is the Saxon ſpirit, where the fire
Of Offa's race? — O fooliſhneſs of grief!
Alas, I had forgot; had Edgar ſpar'd him,
That ſword, to which my madneſs call'd for vengeance,
Ere long was meant to do the bloody deed,
And make the murder parricide. Have I
No friend to do me right?

ORGAR.

Thou haſt, my child;
I am thy friend, thy father. Truſt my care.
Edwin, a word. Retire, my deareſt Daughter:
Virgins, conduct her in.

ELFRIDA.

My Father, No.
What do you do? I muſt not be withheld.
I'll go to yon dire grove, and claſp my Huſband,
My murder'd Huſband. Why reſtrain me, Sir?

Can my ſad eye dart fire thro' his cold breaſt,
And light up life anew?

ORGAR.

Go in, my child,
And ſeek Tranquillity.

ELFRIDA.

And ſeek Tranquillity!
Ah! who will lead me to her darkling cell?
I know her now, ſhe is Death's pale-ey'd ſiſter,
Her Manſion is the murky charnel vault,
Whence oft at midnight by the moon's pale gleam
She ſees the neighb'ring Sexton with his ſpade
Upturn the green ſwerd, delving the dank grave
Of ſome love-ſtricken Maid. Yes, lead me thither.

CHORUS.

This way, my deareſt Miſtreſs.

ELFRIDA.

Hold, nay, hold;
Croud not around me. Let me pauſe awhile.
Albina, thou alone ſhalt join my miſ'ry;
I've much to utter to thy friendly ear.
Lead on, thou gentle maid; thy ſingle arm
Shall prop my trembling frame, thy ſingle voice
Speak peace to my afflictions.

[*Exit with the principal Virgin.*

ORGAR, EDWIN, SEMICHORUS.

ORGAR.

On your lives,
Virgins, let no diſturbing ſtep approach her.
Say, Edwin (for I gueſs 'twas you that brought
Theſe tidings hither) where was royal Edgar,
When late you left him?

EDWIN.

At my maſter's ſide,
Repentant of the ſtroke.

ORGAR.

Comes he not back
To Harewood?

SEMICHORUS.

Heav'n forbid! Elfrida's brain
Would madden at the ſight.

ORGAR.

Miſtake not, Virgins;
I did not mean, at this diſtreſsful hour
The King ſhould ſee my daughter.

SEMICHORUS.

No, for pity,
Do not profane this ſabbath of her grief.
O be her ſorrow ſacred!

ORGAR.

Fear not, Virgins,
Her peace is my beſt care, and, to enſure it,
I'll haſte this inſtant by young Edwin's guidance
To find the Monarch. Some four miles from Harewood
Stands old Earl Egbert's caſtle, my faſt friend.
With him will I perſuade the King to ſojourn,
Till my child's grief abate, that too to ſpeed
Be it your buſineſs, Virgins. Watching ever
Each happy interval, when your ſoft tongues
May hint his praiſes, till by practice won
She bear their fuller blazon. Elfrid's welfare
Requires this friendly office at your hands;
And Edgar's virtues bear ſuch genuine luſtre,
That Truth itſelf directs——

[*Exit Orgar.*

SEMICHORUS.

As Truth directs,
So only ſhall we act. This day has ſhewn
What dire effects await its violation.
Strait is the road of Truth and plain,
And, tho' acroſs the ſacred way
Ten thouſand falſe meanders ſtray,
'Tis ours to walk direct,

And, with ſage caution circumſpect,
Pace ſlowly thro' the ſolemn ſcene.

[The principal Virgin returns.

CHORUS, SEMICHORUS.

CHORUS.

Has Orgar left the grove?

SEMICHORUS.

He has, my ſiſter.

CHORUS.

Then hear, and aid Elfrida's laſt reſolve,
Who takes the only way ſtern fate has left
To ſave her plighted faith for ever pure
To her dead Athelwold.

SEMICHORUS.

Forbid it, Patience;
Forbid it, that ſubmiſſive Calm of ſoul,
Which teaches meek-ey'd Piety to ſmile
Beneath the ſcourge of Heav'n.

CHORUS.

Ye need not fear it,
She means not ſelf-deſtruction. Thanks to heav'n,
Huge and o'erbearing as her miſery is,
It cannot ſo obliterate from her breaſt

The written rule of Duty. Her pure Soul
Means, on the inſtant, to devote itſelf
To heav'n and holineſs. Aſſiſt her ſtrait,
Leſt Edgar's preſence, and her Father's rage,
Prevent the bleſt intention. See, ſhe comes.
Kneel on each ſide, devoutly kneel around her,
And breath ſome pray'r in high and ſolemn ſtrains,
That Angels from their thrones of light may hear,
And ratify her vow.

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

[*Elfrida kneels, and the Virgins divide into two Troops.*]

SEMICHORUS.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from theſe nether thrones of Light,
And O in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your ſolemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conſpicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

ELFRIDA.

Hear firſt, that Athelwold's ſad widow ſwears
To rear a hallow'd Convent o'er the place,
Where ſtream'd his blood; there will ſhe weep thro' Life
Immur'd with this chaſt throng of Virgins; there
Each day ſhall ſix times hear her full-voic'd Choir

Chaunt the ſlow requiem o'er her martyr'd Lord.
There too, when Midnight lours with awful gloom,
She'll riſe obſervant of the ſtated call
Of waking Grief, bear the dim livid taper
Along the winding iſles, and at the Altar
Kiſs ev'ry pale ſhrine with her trembling lips,
Preſs the cold ſtone with her bent knee, and call
On ſainted Athelwold.

SEMICHORUS.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from theſe nether thrones of Light,
And O in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word;
Then wing your ſolemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conſpicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

ELFRIDA.

Hear next, that Athelwold's ſad widow ſwears
Never to violate the holy vow
She to his truth firſt plighted; ſweare to bear
The ſober ſingleneſs of Widowhood
To her cold grave. If from this chaſte reſolve
She ev'n in thought ſhould ſwerve, if gaudy pomp,
Or flatt'ring greatneſs e'er ſhould tempt one wiſh
To ſtray beyond this purpoſe, may that heav'n,

Which hears this vow, punish its violation
As heav'nly justice ought.

CHORUS.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of light,
And O in golden characters record,
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

P. 27. line 7. for *hurried* read *buried*.
P. 33. l. 17. for *that* read *their*.
P. 56. l. 9. for *eye* read *eyn*.
P. 58. l. 5. for *shall* read *shalt*.
P. 72. l. 4. for *are* read *is*.